

BENJAMIN DALE

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Benjamin Dale was a British composer of some distinction and has been unfairly eclipsed by other British composers particularly Elgar whom the BBC keep telling us was a superb composer and that he only wrote masterpieces as Barbirolli was always saying.

Dale's music usually has a coherence, is well written and among his finest works is some excellent chamber music. His works for the viola fill a deplorable gap in this repertoire which Vaughan Williams also helped to fill in such works as *Flos Campi* and, of course, *Frank Stiles*, our finest living violist and composer for the viola.

Dale was born in Upper Holloway, Islington on 17 July 1885. His father, Charles James, came from Staffordshire and made pottery and his mother, Frances Anne Hallett, was the daughter of a furniture maker in Clerkenwell. Father was a self-taught amateur musician, a church organist, writer of hymn tunes, mainly found in the *Methodist Hymn Book*, and he directed the *Finsbury Choral Association* which attracted people like Stanford and Sullivan. Dale senior also set up the *Metropolitan College of Music* in Holloway which became the *London College of Music*.

Benjamin was one of seven children and one of his brothers was Henry Hallett Dale who became President of the Royal Society and specialized in health matters particularly with regard to the immune system. By the time Benjamin was 14, he was an accomplished pianist and had composed a collection of pieces which included a concert overture *Horatius* which had a glowing review in *The Musical Times* after a performance in the Portman Rooms on 10 May 1900. He left school at 15 to become a student at the Royal Academy of Music with which he had a close association for the rest of his life. He studied composition with Frederick Corder and Bax joined RAM the same day as Dale did and they remained lifelong friends. Corder wrote a biography of Liszt and was an admirer of Wagner. He had good taste.

At RAM, Dale composed many works including two overtures, the *Concertstucke* for organ and orchestra and the *Piano Sonata in D minor* as well as the first movement of a *Piano Trio*. The *Sonata* was his first published work and was highly regarded as it still is today among discerning musicians although it did go through a period of neglect. It is an extended work and takes up about sixty pages. And lots of comments were made about the alleged influences in the sonata and distinguished pianists took it up including York Bowen, to whom it is dedicated, Myra Hess, Moiseiwitsch, Irene Scharer and Moura Lympany.

Dale then wrote his *Suite for viola and piano*. This was 1906 and it is a challenging piece written especially for the great Lionel Tertis who played it frequently and often with Bowen at the piano. The last two movements were orchestrated and performed by the Royal Philharmonic under Nikisch in 1911. This work was followed by the *Fantasia for viola and piano* of 1910 and the *Introduction and Andante* of 1911 for six violas.

He was appointed professor of harmony at RAM in 1909. The outbreak of World War 1 saw him travelling to the Bayreuth Festival. He was kept under parole in Nuremberg as an enemy alien and interred at Ruhleben, near Berlin, along with other musicians such as Frederick Keel. Dale joined forces with the Canadian, Ernest MacMillan, and together they played arrangements of symphonies and put on a performance of *The Mikado* at the camp from memory. In 1918, at the end of the war, Dale unfortunately broke his arm and settled in the Netherlands for a while.

Although his health was deteriorating, he travelled to various parts of the world examining for the ABRSM in Australia and New Zealand. He continued to compose including a *Violin Sonata*, *A Song*

of Praise and the Symphonic Impression *The Flowing Tide*, which was described as a Tone Poem, which was begun in 1924. It was during a rehearsal of *The Flowing Tide* that he collapsed and died on 20 July 1943. He was 58.

His work is perhaps occasionally a little too long for the material he employs. His chamber music is often exemplary and his music for the viola is important as it was with Vaughan Williams and, of course, with Frank Stiles.

List of works

Orchestral

- Horatius, Overture (1899)
- Overture for orchestra (1900)
- The Tempest*, Overture to the Shakespeare play (1902)
- Concertstück (Concert Piece) for organ and orchestra (1904)
- Concert Overture in G minor (1904)
- English Dance for small orchestra (1919); arrangement of original (1916) for string octet, also arranged for violin and piano, Op. 10, No. 1 [see below]
- Prunella for small orchestra (1923); arrangement of original (1916) for violin and piano [see below]
- A Holiday Tune for small orchestra (1925); arrangement of original (1920) for violin and piano [see below]
- The Flowing Tide*, Tone Poem (1924–1943)

Chamber

- Piano Trio in D minor – 1st movement only (performed 1902)
- English Dance for 4 violins, 2 violas and 2 cellos (1916); originally intended to introduce Act 3 of Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*

Violin

- English Dance for violin and piano, Op. 10, No. 1 (1916); originally titled *Country Dance*
- Prunella for violin and piano, Op. 10, No.2 (1916); originally intended as an *Intermezzo* for the play of the same name by Laurence Housman and Harley Granville-Barker
- A Holiday Tune for violin and piano, Op. 10, No. 3 (1920)
- Sonata in E major for violin and piano, Op. 11 (1921–1922)
- Ballade in C minor for violin and piano, Op. 15 (1926)

Viola

- Suite in D major for viola and piano, Op. 2 (1906)
- Maestoso – Allegretto espressivo
- Romance (also arranged for viola and orchestra, 1909)
- Finale: Allegro (also viola and orchestra, 1909)
- Phantasy in D minor for viola and piano, Op. 4 (1910)
- Introduction and Andante for 6 violas, Op. 5 (1911, revised 1913)
- English Dance (1916); arrangement for viola and piano by York Bowen; original for violin and piano

Keyboard

- Organ Sonata in D minor (first performed 1902)
- Sonata in D minor for piano, Op. 1 (1902–1905)
- Night Fancies, Impromptu in D \flat major for piano, Op. 3 (1907)
- English Dance for piano (1919); original (1916) for violin and piano
- Prunella for piano (1923); original (1916) for violin and piano

Vocal

Music, when soft voices die, a song setting in Eb major for treble voices with piano accompaniment of the poem by Shelley (1914)
Part-songs, Op. 8[?][2] (1914)
My Garden in Ab, setting of a mystical poem by T.E. Brown
Crossing the Bar in F major, setting of the poem by Tennyson
Two Songs from Shakespeare, Op. 9 (1919); Songs from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night
O Mistress Mine in F major for low voice and piano
Come Away, Death in Db major for low voice, viola and piano

Choral

Three Christmas Carols, Op. 6 (1911)
Before the Paling of the Stars for chorus and orchestra, Op. 7 (1912); setting of a Christmas hymn by Christina Rossetti
A Song of Praise, Festival Anthem for soloists, chorus and orchestra, Op. 12 (1923); words by Reginald Heber; composed for the 269th annual festival of the Sons of the Clergy
Rosa Mystica, Carol for mixed voices with tenor solo (1925); the words from the Mediaeval anthology collected by Mary Segar

Writing

Harmony, Counterpoint and Improvisation by Benjamin Dale, Gordon Jacob, Hugo Anson

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